AI-created Iran protest videos gain traction

Doctored videos collectively amass some 3.5m views across online platforms

WASHINGTON: AI-generated videos purportedly depicting protests in Iran have flooded the web, researchers said on Wednesday, as social media users push hyper-realistic deepfakes to fill an information void amid the country's internet restrictions.

US disinformation watchdog NewsGuard said it identified seven AI-generated videos depicting the Iranian protests — created by both pro- and anti-government actors — that have collectively amassed some 3.5 million views across online platforms.

Among them was a video shared on the Elon Musk-owned platform X showing women protesters smashing a vehicle belonging to the Basij, the Iranian paramilitary force deployed to suppress the protests.

One X post featuring the AI clip, shared by what NewsGuard described as anti-regime users, garnered nearly 720,000 views.

Anti-regime X and TikTok users in the United States also posted AI videos depicting Iranian protesters symbolically renaming local streets after President Donald Trump.

One such clip shows a protester changing a street sign to "Trump St" while other demonstrators cheer, with an overlaid caption reading: "Iranian protestors are renaming the streets after Trump." Trump had repeatedly talked in recent days about coming to the aid of the Iranian people over the crackdown on protests that rights groups say has left at least 3,428 people dead.

Trump said he had been told the killings of protesters in Iran had been halted, but added that he would "watch it and see" about threatened military action.

Pro-regime social media users also shared AI videos purportedly showing large-scale pro-government counterprotests throughout the Islamic republic.

The AI creations highlight the growing prevalence of what experts call "hallucinated" visual content on social media during major news events, often overshadowing authentic images and videos.

In this case, AI creators were filling an information void caused by the internet blackout imposed by the Iranian regime as it sought to suppress demonstrations, experts said.

"There's a lot of news — but no way to get it because of the internet blackout," said NewsGuard analyst Ines Chomnalez.

"Foreign social media users are turning to AI video generators to advance their own narratives about the unfolding chaos." The fabricated videos were the latest example of AI tools being deployed to distort fast-developing breaking news.

AI fabrications, often amplified by partisan actors, have fueled alternate realities around recent news events, including the US capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and a deadly shooting by immigration agents in Minneapolis.

Fact-checkers also uncovered misrepresented images that created misleading narratives about the Iranian protests, the largest since the Islamic Republic was proclaimed in 1979.

One months-old video purportedly showing demonstrations in Iran was actually filmed in Greece in November 2025, while another claiming to depict a protester tearing down an Iranian flag was filmed in Nepal during last year's protests that toppled the Himalayan nation's government.—AFP

Australian festival apologises for snubbing Palestinian author

SYDNEY: A leading Australian arts festival apologised on Thursday for disinviting a Palestinian author, retracting claims her attendance would be "culturally insensitive" following a mass shooting targeting Jews at Bondi Beach.

The Adelaide Festival was forced to cancel its popular writers' week on Tuesday as scores of participants pulled out over the treatment of author and academic Randa Abdel-Fattah.

With many questioning whether the backlash might spell the end of the event for good, organisers changed tack and apologised.

"We have reversed the decision and will reinstate Dr Abdel-Fattah's invitation to speak at the next Adelaide Writers' Week in 2027," festival organisers said in a statement.

Australia's premier annual cultural event, which lures artists from around the world, unleashed the storm last week when it told Abdel-Fattah it did not "wish to proceed" with her appearance.

"We stated that this was because it would be culturally insensitive to allow her to participate," organisers said.

"We retract that statement. We apologise to Dr Abdel-Fattah unreservedly for the harm the Adelaide Festival Corporation has caused her." Abdel-Fattah said she accepted the apology.

"I accept this apology as acknowledgement of our right to speak publicly and truthfully about the atrocities that have been committed against the Palestinian people," she said.—AFP

Venezuelan leader Machado meets US president

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump met Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado on Thursday afternoon, in a high-stakes encounter that could affect how the US leader seeks to shape the South American country's political future.

Machado, who fled Venezuela in a daring seaborne escape last month, is competing for Trump's ear with members of Venezuela's government and seeking to ensure she has a role in governing the nation going forward.

The lunch meeting marks the first time the two have met in person.

"I know the president was looking forward to this meeting, and he was expecting it to be a good and positive discussion with Miss Machado, who is really a remarkable and brave voice for many of the people of Venezuela," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters during a briefing.

She said Trump's earlier assessment of Machado, in which he said she did not command the respect in Venezuela to govern it, stands.

After the UScaptured Venezuela's longtime leader, Nicolas Maduro, in a snatch-and-grab operation this month, various opposition figures, members of Venezuela's diaspora and politicians throughout the US and Latin America have expressed hope that Venezuela will begin the process of democratisation.

But for now, Trump has said he is focused on economically rebuilding Venezuela and securing US access to the country's oil.

The day after the Jan 3 operation, he expressed doubts that Machado had the backing needed to return to the country and govern, telling reporters: "She doesn't have the support within or the respect within the country." Trump has on several occasions praised Delcy Rodriguez, Venezuela's interim president, saying in an interview on Wednesday: "She's been very good to deal with."

A Nobel for Trump?

One potential topic of conversation for Thursday's White House meeting was the Nobel Peace Prize, which was awarded to Machado last month, a snub to Trump, who has long sought the award.

Machado has suggested she would give the prize to the US president for having deposed Maduro, though the Norwegian Nobel Institute has said the prize cannot be transferred, shared or revoked.

Asked if he wanted Machado to give him the prize, Trump said: "No, I didn't say that. She won the Nobel Peace Prize." Pressed on what he would do if she brought the prize nonetheless, he responded: "Well, that's what I'm hearing. I don't know, but I shouldn't be the one to say. "I think we're just going to talk."—Reuters

VENEZUELAN opposition leader Maria Corina Machado greets supporters outside the White House following a meeting with President Donald Trump.—AFP

US court overturns order to release Mahmoud Khalil

Ruling raises prospect of pro-Palestinian activist's rearrest

NEW YORK: A US appeals court overturned a ruling that led to the release of prominent pro-Palestinian protest leader Mahmoud Khalil, according to court documents filed on Thursday, raising the prospect of his rearrest.

Khalil, a legal permanent resident in the United States who is married to a US citizen and has a US-born son, was detained by immigration authorities for three months beginning in March. He faced potential deportation for allegedly posing a threat to US foreign policy interests.

A former Columbia University student who was one of the most visible leaders of nationwide pro-Palestinian campus protests, Khalil was released from custody in June, but faced continued threats of deportation from federal authorities.

New Jersey federal judge Michael Farbiarz had ruled that Khalil's detention by immigration authorities was unlawful. But Thursday's ruling by the Philadelphia-based appeals court said Farbiarz did not have "subject-matter" jurisdiction in the case and that an immigration court should have adjudicated it.

"Today's ruling is deeply disappointing, but it does not break our resolve," Khalil said in a statement.

"The door may have been opened for potential re-detainment down the line, but it has not closed our commitment to Palestine and to justice and accountability." The ruling, which could be appealed, does not take immediate effect, meaning Khalil will remain free for now.

The New York chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union said in a statement that "Mr Khalil's legal team has several legal avenues they may pursue." In September, an immigration judge in Louisiana ordered Khalil be deported to Algeria or Syria after failing to disclose information on his application for US permanent residency. Khalil's lawyers vowed to appeal that ruling.

Prospect of rearrest

The 2-1 ruling by a panel of the Philadelphia-based 3rd US Circuit Court of Appeals opens the door to Khalil being rearrested after it ordered the dismissal of a lawsuit he filed challenging his initial detention.

The court said that under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the district court that considered his lawsuit was not the proper forum to address his claims, which should have been heard through an appeal of a removal order from an immigration judge.

Thursday's ruling came from US Circuit Judges Thomas Hardiman and Stephanos Bibas, both of whom were appointed by Republican presidents.

"The scheme Congress enacted governing immigration proceedings provides Khalil a meaningful forum in which to raise his claims later on in a petition for review of a final order of removal," they wrote in an unsigned opinion.

US Circuit Judge Arianna Freeman dissented, saying Congress did not mean to foreclose meaningful judicial review over Khalil's claims that his detention and potential re-detention violate his free speech rights under the US Constitution's First Amendment.

'Deeply disappointing'

"Khalil claims that the government violated his fundamental constitutional rights," wrote Freeman, who was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden. "He has also alleged, and proven, irreparable injuries during his detention."

Khalil in a statement said the ruling is "deeply disappointing, but it does not break our resolve." His lawyers vowed to appeal the ruling, which does not take immediate effect, preventing his re-detention for now.

"The door may have been opened for potential re-detainment down the line, but it has not closed our commitment to Palestine and to justice and accountability," Khalil said. The US Department of Homeland Security did not respond to a request for comment.—Agencies

Tyrannosaurus rex did not reach full size until age 40, study finds

WASHINGTON: There is no question that Tyrannosaurus rex got big. In fact, this fearsome dinosaur may have been Earth's most massive land predator of all time. But the question of how quickly T. rex achieved its maximum size has been a matter of debate.

A new study examining bone tissue microstructure in the leg bones of 17 fossil specimens concludes that Tyrannosaurus took about 40 years to reach its maximum size of roughly 8 tons, some 15 years more than previously estimated. As part of the study, the researchers identified previously unknown growth marks in these bones that could be seen only using polarized light.

"This growth trajectory is more gradual than expected," said paleohistologist Holly Woodward of the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences, lead author of the study published this week in the journal PeerJ. "Rather than T. rex ratcheting up to adult size quickly, it spent a lot of its life at juvenile to subadult sizes." The researchers scrutinized annual growth rings - akin to those present in tree trunks - in the Tyrannosaurus leg bones from the various specimens, which ranged from smaller juveniles to massive adults.

"We also found that growth-ring spacing in individual T. rex was variable. T. rex had a flexible growth pattern. Some years it didn't grow much, while other years it grew a lot," Woodward said.

"This likely depended on resource - food - availability or environmental conditions. In other words, if conditions weren't great, it didn't spend energy on growing, but when conditions were good, it could grow larger. This flexibility allowed it to survive harsh times while growing larger than other carnivores, so it could outcompete others for resources. Ultimately, T. rex was only competing against other T. rex for food," Woodward added.—Reuters

15 terrorists gunned down in KP: ISPR

Continued from Page 1

terrorism-related fatalities increasing by 21 per cent year on year, according to a report released by the Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

In a press conference last week, ISPR Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry shared that law enforcement agencies of Pakistan — including the army, police, Federal Constabulary, and intelligence agencies — conducted a total of 75,175 IBOs in 2025.

Breaking it down, he said 14,658 operations were conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 58,778 in Balochistan, and 1,739 in other regions of Pakistan. He added that 5,397 terror incidents took place in Pakistan in 2025, of which 3,811 were reported from KP (71pc), 1,557 from Balochistan (29pc), and 29 from other areas.

Trump sheathes his sabre in standoff with Iran

Continued from Page 1

Trump did not want war, and had also asked Iran not to attack the US interests in the region.

Speaking of the protests, the envoy maintained that the people had a legitimate right to protest and that the government had engaged in talks with the demonstrators.

However, he said that the coverage of the US and Western media incited violence, further escalating the situation.

Referring to the statements issued by Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on January 7, he said that they amounted to interference in Iran's internal affairs, further stoking the tensions.

The envoy described the events as the worst in Iran's history.

He alleged that armed groups carried out killings, attacked mosques, imambargahs, and committed acts of arson.

Mr Moghadam held that in case of aggression from Israel or the US, Tehran had already conveyed that it remained prepared.

He added that the country remained on high alert and its airspace had been closed temporarily.

Gulf trio

Meanwhile, regional neighbors also played a critical role in defusing the crisis. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman led "frantic" diplomatic efforts to talk Trump out of an attack, fearing "grave blowbacks in the region," a senior Saudi official said.

The Gulf trio worked to convince Trump to give Iran a chance to show good intentions.

"It was a sleepless night to defuse more bombs in the region," the official said on condition of anonymity, adding that dialogue was continuing to consolidate the gained trust.

The Gulf efforts aimed to "avoid an uncontrollable situation in the region", the Saudi official said.

"We told Washington that an attack on Iran would open the way for a series of grave blowbacks in the region," the official added.

UNSC session scheduled

The international community is set to formalise its scrutiny of the unrest. The UN Security Council scheduled a briefing on the situation in Iran for Thursday, Jan 15, 2026.

"I can now confirm that the (Security Council) presidency intends to schedule a briefing... requested by the United States," said Khadija Ahmed, spokeswoman for the Somali mission to the UN, which holds the rotating presidency.

No confidence in Pahlavi

While backing away from immediate intervention, Trump appeared tepid on regime change figures. In an interview with Reuters, Trump expressed uncertainty over whether Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late shah of Iran, could muster the support to take over.

"He seems very nice, but I don't know how he'd play within his own country," Trump said. "And we really aren't up to that point yet."

Despite the pause in US military threats, international pressure on Tehran persisted. The Group of Seven nations condemned what they described as "brutal repression".

Rights groups report the toll has been heavy. The U.S.-based HRANA rights group verified the deaths of 2,435 protesters, while Amnesty International accused authorities of mass unlawful killings on an "unprecedented scale."

Deepfake videos

As information flows remained hampered by an internet blackout, disinformation complicated the narrative. Researchers identified AI-generated videos depicting protests filling the void.

US watchdog NewsGuard identified seven AI-generated videos created by both pro- and anti-government actors that amassed 3.5 million views. Some deepfakes depicted protesters renaming streets after Trump, while others showed fabricated large-scale government counter-protests.

"Foreign social media users are turning to AI video generators to advance their own narratives about the unfolding chaos," said NewsGuard analyst Ines Chomnalez.— Agencies / Monitoring Desk

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In January 1978, Gen Zia's martial law regime mercilessly mowed down striking textile mill workers in the 'City of Saints.' Till today, the scale of the killings is disputed and no official account exists of what is widely considered the bloodiest massacre in Pakistan's labour history...

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A critique of the CSS English paper published in 1997 remains unanswered nearly three decades later. What does that tell us?

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PLUS: Nadeem F. Paracha on Changing Doctrines, Durriya Kazi on Truth, Animals in Sports Branding, Ishtiaq Sandhu's 'Of Soul and Soil', Maliha Diwan's Memoni Dumplings, Dr Khwaja Ali Shahid's Gardening, Auntie Agni and Static Cling

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As Nimra Bucha returns to the stage in Karachi with a blistering performance in *The Mother*, the cast and crew behind this emotionally unsparing adaptation of a French play reveal the internal and external challenges of bringing these characters to life

ESSAY: ROMANTICISING RED FLAGS
Pakistani dramas continue to romanticise toxic men and reinforce that women's suffering is a necessary stepping stone to men's moral evolution. What are the ramifications of normalising such behaviour on society as a whole?

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